

You are not on your own

A booklet to help children
and adults talk about a
parent's drinking



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Before you start reading this booklet, this is a space for you to draw your family, your house, your friends or something that you enjoy doing.



What is this booklet about?

Lots of adults drink alcohol, but in some families the adult's drinking can make things difficult at home and can cause problems and worries.

If this is happening it can make you worry about all sorts of things and can affect different areas of your life, like school, home, friends or money.

This booklet is to help you and an adult who you trust to talk together about what is happening in your life. It is written for children, but at the end of each section is a part written for adults.

This booklet is for children who live in all sorts of families. You might live with your parents, grandparents, aunts or uncles. You might be in care or one of your parents might be in prison. If you are worried about a parent or carer drinking too much then this booklet is for you. 'Drinking too much' means the adult drinks in a way that hurts them or you and your family.

We've spoken with children who have parents or carers who drink too much and this is what they said would help. We hope it helps you.



Information for adults

This booklet is aimed at children aged 8-12, but can be adapted to suit the child you are working with. It is based on messages from children who are in this situation.

It is not an assessment tool but is designed to help you have a conversation with a child where there is an adult in their life drinking too much. You might be using this resource on its own or as a part of a larger piece of work you are doing with this child or their family. To help you with this there are some simple exercises for the child to complete. We would recommend that you read through all of the sections in this booklet before you begin and that you plan for time-out during your conversations if the need arises. The booklet also signposts you to other resources or organisations that you may find helpful.

Worries about having this conversation

Children are often worried about talking to adults about what is happening at home. These are some of the worries children have. Put a circle around the ones you are worried about.

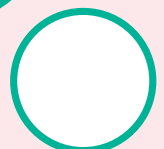
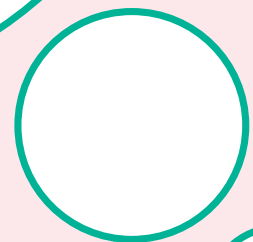
Will the adult tell
someone else?

Will I get someone
into trouble?

Will it make
things worse?

Will I get into
trouble?

Something else?



You are not on your own

Sometimes young people feel like they are on their own and no-one can understand. But you're not alone.

There will be other children in your school who live with a parent or carer who drinks too much. In fact there are over one million children in this situation. That might not sound like that many but that's the same as all the people who live in Birmingham, and that's the second largest city in Britain.

You might not tell people about your worries, because you are scared or embarrassed, and there will be other children in your school feeling the same.

If things are really bad, don't forget there are people out there who understand and want to help.



Information for adults



Remember that you will need to follow confidentiality and data protection procedures in relation to this booklet. Make sure that the child understands what will happen if they tell you confidential information, and state this each time you use the booklet. Also decide on a safe place where the booklet will be kept and explain this to the child. If, as an adult, you find anything difficult to deal with as you talk through the resource, seek support from your line manager.

You don't need to be an expert in alcohol to talk through this book, but if you do want more information before you begin then you can find out more by reading 'Swept Under the Carpet', a report on parental alcohol misuse, from www.starsnationalinitiative.org.uk

How it affects my life

Whether or not you live with the adult drinking too much, being in this situation can make life more difficult for you.

Preeti is nine and her dad drinks every day. She has to get her brothers and sisters ready for school in the morning and is often late for school. When she gets home she is never sure whether her parents will be fighting. She cooks the dinner and tries to keep the house tidy.

Jayden is 12. He lives with his gran because his mum drinks and his dad is in prison. He sees his mum most days. He finds it hard to concentrate in class and often doesn't do his homework. He is always in trouble at school. Last week he got excluded after a fight with a boy who laughed at his mum.

You can see that having a parent or carer who drinks too much affects Preeti and Jayden in lots of different ways. What are the ways it affects you?

at home...

at school...

Information for adults

You may want to explore how Preeti and Jayden might be feeling before moving on to discuss how the child is affected by their own parent's drinking. Lots of children find themselves with increased responsibility at home, which can affect how they cope at school. Contact www.youngcarers.net and www.youngcarer.com for more information about being a young carer, or your local Children's Services for information about local young carer projects. Remember that siblings in the same family can have very different experiences.

Positive experiences at school or social clubs can increase a child's self esteem and ability to cope.

How it makes me feel

Feelings

You might have lots of different feelings when someone you care for drinks too much.

It's normal to have these feelings, and your feelings may be different on different days. Do you ever have any of these feelings?



Worries

Children in this situation often have lots of worries.

'I'm worried about my mum and my family and stuff like that.'

Girl, aged 8

Liam is 11 and when he is at home he worries about what will happen next, how to keep his sister safe and about people finding out.

Casey is nine and when she is at school she worries about what is happening at home, being bullied and falling behind with work.

What do you worry about?





Information for adults

Having someone listen to your worries can be very powerful, and it might be the first time the child has spoken about it – this takes a lot of courage. It may make them upset or it might be upsetting for you to hear how hard it is for them; this is OK. Make sure you have the time and space set aside to have these conversations and have thought about what you will do if there are any child protection concerns. You both might need a break before returning to other activities.

To find out more about parental alcohol and wider substance misuse, and its impact on children, see The Children's Society's awareness-raising and training DVD resource 'Ask me about me' at www.starsnationalinitiative.org.uk or read the BASW pocket guide on alcohol and other drugs available from www.basw.co.uk

It's not your fault

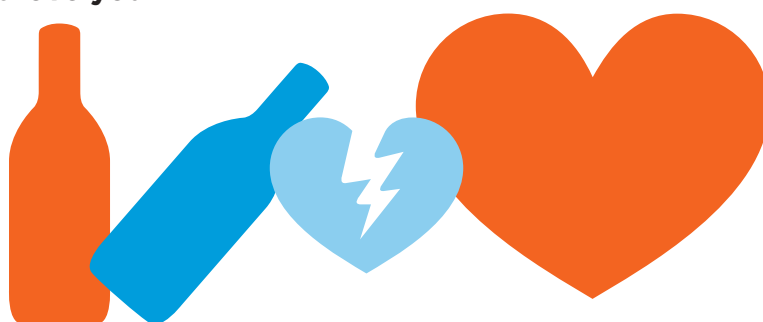
There are lots of reasons why someone might drink too much. Whatever the reason why, other children in your situation said the most important thing for you to know is...

- **It's not your fault**
- **You can't stop them**
- **There are people who understand**

Some people cannot stop drinking once they start without the help of professionals, while others can drink sensibly. There are lots of reasons why this can happen. Nothing you have done made your parent drink too much – even if they say this when they are angry it's not true.

Just because your parent or carer drinks too much it does not mean that they are not good people or that they don't love you.

'I always thought it was my fault and that I caused all this. I'm a lot older now but I know others will think that their parents don't love 'em, or that they don't mean anything, or that it's their fault, and it's not... they're just tied up in it and it's part of their lives.'
Young person, aged 18



Information for adults

Some people think alcoholism is an illness and others think it is a coping tool that means they find it difficult to stop without help. We don't really know why some people drink too much when others do not, but whatever the reason you can still be supportive by listening to the child and helping them to understand that it is not their fault. Children say that being told that it is not their fault is a very important message for them to hear. Make sure that you spend time talking about this.

Keeping safe

You have a right to be safe.

Being safe means not being in danger and being looked after (like having enough food, clothes or heat in your home).


When your parent or carer drinks too much things might happen to you or around you that make you feel unhappy or unsafe.

They might not be around much, they might have gone missing, they might be doing things that make the house unsafe, or saying and doing things you don't like. Someone might be hurting you or someone else in your family. Someone might be encouraging you to drink or take drugs. If this is happening talk to a trusted adult.

Some children have been hurt trying to stop their parents drinking, being violent or doing dangerous things. Don't try to stop this yourself – phone the police or an adult you trust.

If your parents or carers are asleep or out, and someone you don't know or don't trust rings the doorbell, don't answer the door.

Remember you can always call **Childline 0800 1111** if you feel unsafe.



'It felt really good when I could talk to people because I felt like a bottle ready to explode and I didn't want that to happen.'

Boy, aged 12

You might face an emergency

This could be:

The adult hurting themselves because of drinking (for example falling over), hurting themselves on purpose (for example cutting themselves) or not being able to wake up.

If this happens call an ambulance. This is really easy, just follow these steps:

- 1. Dial 999**
- 2. Tell them where you are (if you don't know your address maybe you should practise it or write it down somewhere)**
- 3. If you know what has happened tell the ambulance people; it might help and you won't get into trouble**
- 4. Stay with the person who is poorly until the ambulance gets there.**

Dealing with an emergency is not nice and you shouldn't have to do it, but if you do, it would be good not to have to do this alone. It might be helpful to come up with an emergency plan just in case something does happen (eg where will you go to keep yourself safe? who will you call?)



Information for adults

If you have any child protection concerns for this child then you need to follow your local child protection protocol. Your agency should have a folder which has the protocol clearly written down and should advise you on what to do. Some agencies (like schools) have a named person, so contact them first. Seek support from your line manager if you are unsure about what to do.

You could role-play the emergency plan with the child or talk through what they might do if they felt unsafe (eg. who could they ask for help in an emergency?).

It is important to know that a heavy drinker should not stop drinking suddenly. They will need support from an alcohol service to reduce drinking gradually. For further information on alcohol misuse see www.alcoholconcern.org.uk

What if this happens?	My plan

You are really important. You are not on your own, and there are laws and people who can help to keep you safe. Don't forget you have a right to be safe.



Information for adults

You may feel it is appropriate for the child to record their address and plan on a separate piece of paper to take away with them.

Often drinking doesn't come in isolation and there may be additional issues such as drug misuse, domestic violence or mental health issues. For information about this see:

www.starsnationalinitiative.org.uk
www.womensaid.org.uk or www.thehideout.org.uk
www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfo/mentalhealthandgrowingup/parentalmentalillness.aspx

What can I do for me?

You are an important unique individual with a wonderful future ahead of you. Although it might not feel like it, your situation will change because you will grow up and have more choices.

The fact that you have a parent or carer who drinks too much does not need to stop you doing things or limit what you can do in your future. You can choose to be different.

To help with the situation you are in right now, other children have found these ideas helpful:

Find someone to talk to

It's good to have someone to talk to, but choosing someone can be hard. You could talk to other children about who they trust. Some children can talk to their mum, dad or carer, but some can't.

Other people you might want to talk to are people at school like a teacher, helper, dinner supervisor or school nurse.

Some children get on with an aunt or uncle, grandparent or older brother or sister. You might have a friend whose mum or dad you trust.

If you don't want to tell someone who knows you, you could call **Childline 0800 1111**.

Have fun

When your parent or carer drinks too much, it can be easy to forget to have fun. You are still a child and should be able to do lots of things that you enjoy or make you laugh and smile.

Having hobbies or going to a social club can be great fun and so can hanging out or chatting with your friends.

'When my nana talked to me about it she was really kind, and she helped me get over it. She says that everything is going to be Ok.'
Girl, aged 8

What might you do?

'Sometimes I draw to take my mind off it. And I just try and concentrate on one thing at a time to just cool my temperature down and stop crying and stuff.'
Girl, aged 8

What makes me smile?

Three things I will
do to have fun



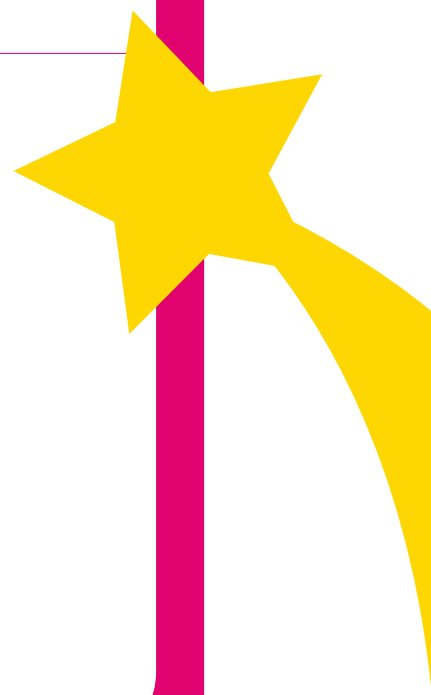
Information for adults

There are a number of things that can help a child to have a more positive future. Find something they are good at or interested in and use this to encourage positive friendships or activities and find positive role models. Doing this builds self-esteem and helps children feel they have choices and some control in their life. This should not be reward-based.

Plan your future

Having clear goals for your life can help you achieve your dreams. Why not make a list of goals for your future every year? Let's start now:

My goals



Information for adults

You can't solve all of a child's problems, but by listening to a child and working through this booklet you have already made an important difference. If you would like to work with younger children to explore this issue the Rory Activity Pack is a good resource: www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/rory

About The Children's Society

The Children's Society wants to create a society where children and young people are valued, respected and happy. We are committed to helping vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, including children in care and young runaways. We give a voice to disabled children, help young refugees to rebuild their lives and provide relief for young carers. Through our campaigns and research, we seek to influence policy and perceptions so that young people have a better chance in life.

Children are at the heart of all we do. That's why we want to build a better childhood – for every child.

About the Children's Commissioner

Maggie Atkinson is the Children's Commissioner for England. She works to make sure adults in charge ask for children and young people's views about things which affect them, and listen to what they have to say. The role of the Children's Commissioner was created by the Children Act 2004 and is there to promote the voices of children and young people from birth to 18 (up to 21 for young people in care or with learning difficulties).



Further information and resources:

www.starsnationalinitiative.org.uk
www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

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